**Growth in Christ: Part V**

 The rationale for growth in Christ focuses on God's redemptive work and His faithfulness in working out His plan. The believer is the most changed person and is to be the most changing person. Growth is one of the greatest privileges and blessings this side of heaven. Moreover, eternally the believer will continue to grow in his perfected state and family status as a God-pleaser and worshipper. John, in 1 John 3:1-3, describes this as *amazing*!

 Growth in Christ is relational. It is initiated by God's relationship with every believer through Christ and is developed by the Holy Spirit. Throughout his 13 letters, Paul emphasizes *union with Christ* by the use of the phrase, *in Christ*. By it Paul means that Christ has united Himself to the believer and the believer is united to Christ. These are unbreakable relationships formed by God at salvation. God will never change what He has done in His Son (Rom. 8:32-34).

 Every person is either in Christ or out of Christ. Only the believer is in Christ. He is in proper relationship to Christ because Christ is properly related to him by virtue of salvation. The unbeliever is improperly related to Christ and Christ to him. He is in Satan’s family and kingdom.

 At regeneration, the believer is put into Christ - into a proper relationship to Him. At the same time, he has been radically transferred from Satan’s kingdom and family into God’s (Col. 1:13). Therefore, the believer develops more of the character of Christ daily – he grows in Christlikeness. Yet he can and does function as if he is not in Christ. At times he will be motivated by self-pleasing habits learned and practiced while as a member of Satan’s kingdom and family. Habits and their motivation die hard (Proverbs 5:21-22; 26:11). The believer is called to put off self pleasing and its expression daily.

 Growth in Christ is rational. Being in Christ means that the believer thinks God’s thoughts and trusts and obeys. In fact, the believer recognizes this mindset and the resultant activity as the most reasonable way to honor and worship God (Rom. 12:1-2). Previously the unbeliever thought Satan’s thoughts. He desired to please himself as he suppressed the truth of God in his ungodliness (Rom. 1:18-20).

 The suppressing activity learned so well in Satan's kingdom will be replaced by the believer with truth known and truth applied. One such truth is the simple but profound fact: God is God and you are not (Pss. 24:1-2; 46:10). The believer has a new capacity to reinterpret facts, himself, others, and circumstances according to biblical truth. This is key: the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32). How? Truth is a Person, Jesus Christ, and the written Word, the Bible (John 14:6; 17:17). The believer has a new interpretative grid. He will consider and act upon these three non-negotiable truths previously discussed. They are quite simple yet profound: God is big and the believer is small; this is God’s world; and God is the Rule Maker for His glory and the good of His people. However, truth and biblical principles alone are not freeing. It is application of that truth that is key. Wisdom is the application of biblical truth for the purpose of godliness and growth in Christlikeness (Proverbs 1:7; Titus 1:1; Matt. 7:24-27).

 Growth in Christ is religious in nature. Man was created a religious, worshipping being. He was designed to serve and worship the Creator. True worship is not only an act of the will based on proper knowledge of  God and man, but it is to be motivated by a desire to please and honor God. At salvation man was saved in order to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

 Yet his habituation to self-worship and self-pleasing, learned as an unbeliever, competes with his worship of God alone. Knowing the bad news that every believer was a hell-deserving sinner destined for misery in this life is essential for growth in the character of Christ. An aspect of the bad news is summarized in Proverbs 4:18-19 (in contrast to the believer, the unbeliever is in darkness but is satisfied with and ignorant of his darkness)  and Proverbs 13:15b (those who fail to know and apply biblical  principles are destined for misery and hardness in his present life). In part, this is what every believer was saved from.

 Proper understanding of the gospel requires knowing both the bad news and the good news. The good news describes what the sinner was saved to: a relationship with God in Christ by the indwelling, active Holy Spirit. As a child of God the believer is called to please God. The only way to please God is to become more like Jesus Christ. Growth in Christ is one outworking of salvation. The believer is saved in order to please and worship God. Being pleased – satisfied and contented – as one pleases God may be a byproduct and result of pleasing God. But pleasing God to get something can never be the primary motive for pleasing Him (Matthew 6:33).

**Application**:

1. Write out your habits of self pleasing in terms of thoughts, desires, and actions. Be specific. Think in biblical terms. For instance, you may say “I am selfish.” Write out the specifics of your selfishness.

2. Then using Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:8-10 write out specific put ons – biblical thoughts, desires, and actions – that you will put in place of self-pleasing habits.

3. Read Titus 1:1 and Matthew 7:24-27: what do you need to think, to desire, and to do as one growing in Christlikeness?